

191
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Testimony of Bruce MacDonald, Chief Operating Officer of OpSail Connecticut

Each year we present the Connecticut Maritime Heritage Festival, due in no small measure to the support we receive from this committee and those in the community who believe it important to present a family-friendly event that highlights our state's rich maritime past and celebrates one of our state's historic ports on the Thames River in New London.

I will be brief, as I know you have a long night ahead of you, and some difficult decisions to make.

The story of our 2015 festival is outlined on our website, www.ctmaritimefest.com, but I would like to highlight some of the things we hope to accomplish this September.

But before that festival, we are organizing the reception for 250 crew members and cadets from the 200-foot sail training ship, Cuauhtemoc, from the Mexican Naval Academy, and the sail ship Pride of Baltimore II, which arrive in New London on May 2 for a four-day visit.

Such is our reputation that the government of Mexico asked us to organize an event to welcome their cadets and sailors. We are working with the United States Coast Guard Academy and the U.S. Navy to ensure that they get a great Connecticut welcome.

We are also in the planning stages for our September festival—the only one to our knowledge that honors Connecticut's maritime past. As in past years, we will organize a schooner race in the waters of Long Island Sound, stage dock-side educational exhibits, have ships open for touring and, of course, carry out the Great New London Chowder Challenge, an annual delight that introduces people to New London's many great restaurants. New London is not only an important port city, with museums, cultural and historic attractions and the incomparable Ocean Beach Park, it is also a center of culinary excellence.

A particularly important part of this year's festival will be a five-day sail training trip for up to 30 students from New London and Groton aboard the Oliver Hazard Perry, the largest civilian sail training ship in the United States.

It was a star attraction at last year's festival and will play an important role this year as we strive to teach Connecticut's future leaders about their state's important maritime past.

Last year, we had a major navy vessel, the USNS Trenton, docked at Fort Trumbull State Park. We are in discussions with the navy about securing another vessel for this year.

Last year, we highlighted the Coast Guard's 225th anniversary and this year we have been active participants in the community-wide effort known as Connecticut's Submarine Century—a year-long celebration of the 100th anniversary of the U.S. Navy Submarine Base in Groton.

In closing, I would like to thank you for your past support and your patience in listening to my presentation. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them, or get the answers if I don't have them. Thank you.